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SUBJECT: SHIA NEWSPAPER COLUMNIST SUPPORTS CPA DISSOLUTION  
OF SADDAM'S ARMY

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD FOR  
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary: In a March 9 conversation, Al-Adala newspaper columnist Ali Khaleef told PolOff and PAS/Off that economic progress in Iraq has not kept pace with political progress. Coalition Forces (CF) need to do more to fight corruption and promote economic growth in Iraq, he said. Khaleef then said that the CPA orders disbanding the Iraqi Army and Ministry of Information were good ones. These were corrupt institutions, he said, and needed to be replaced. He also said the current de-Ba'athification process is inadequate, as many Saddam-era leaders did not need to join the Ba'ath Party; they gained influential positions through their tribal connections. Khaleef, who teaches Literature at Baghdad University, argued that education is another facet of Iraq that needs to be reformed because the Saddam-era curricula are still largely used. New teachers are especially needed, Khaleef said. He cautioned, however, that the lives of educators in Iraq are difficult and dangerous, as they are sometimes targets of assassination. End Summary

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Reconstruction and Politics Are Paramount  
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12. (C) In a March 9 conversation with PolOff and PAS/Off, Ali Khaleef, a columnist for the Al-Adala newspaper, said that reconstruction and politics are the two biggest issues facing Iraq today. After the fall of Saddam, Khaleef said, CF focused largely on the political progress of Iraq, and did not expend enough energy on Iraq's economic development. As a result, he argued, corruption is rife in Iraq and economic development has not kept pace with political development. CF is responsible for economic development as well as security and politics in Iraq, and must do more for the economic well-being of Iraq. PolOff and PAS/Off pushed back, arguing that USG has already spent almost billions of dollars in reconstruction aid in Iraq. Security problems and GOI corruption, PolOff and PAS/Off argued, were largely responsible for the slow pace of reconstruction.

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Supports CPA Dissolution of Saddam's Army  
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13. (C) While many have criticized the CPA decision to disband the Iraqi Army, Khaleef praised it. Khaleef argued that the Saddam-era Iraqi Army was a corrupt institution. The new Iraq needed a new Army; otherwise the army of the former regime would have launched a coup against the Iraqi government, he said. A new Iraqi Army, loyal to the new Iraqi government, is a necessity, he said.

¶4. (C) Khaleef also praised the dissolution of the Saddam-era Ministry of Information. He cautioned, however, that many of the employees of this now-defunct ministry are now working in other media outlets. He said these officials of the former regime appear on television and in the newspapers, criticizing and distorting CF actions and policies. Khaleef urged CF to promote independent media in Iraq--media that does not simply criticize CF all the time. Iraqi media need to praise the good things going on in Iraq as well as the bad, he said.

¶5. (C) Khaleef argued that limiting the de-Ba'athification process to barring from public service anyone of the rank of "adu firka" and above would not have adequately addressed the problems in the former Iraqi Army and Ministry of Information. He said that many key policy people did not need party membership because they had the right tribal affiliations to implement policies. Others, he noted, had to join the party just to survive, and many even became senior members. He said they were not all ideological supporters of the regime, but benefited from it. Put in a broader context, GOI needed a more nuanced de-Ba'athification process.

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Education System Needs Reform  
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¶6. (C) Khaleef, who teaches Literature at Baghdad University, said that Iraq's education system needs to be reformed as well. In particular, according to Khaleef, the curricula have not been sufficiently reformed; only references to Saddam Hussein have been removed. Students still learn by rote memorization, and do not learn to think

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critically. Also, many unqualified Saddam-era instructors are still teaching, he said.

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Three Forms of Assassination  
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¶7. (C) Khaleef placed assassinations in Iraq into three categories: (1) intellectuals who were former Ba'athists, (2) tribal and personal vendettas, and (3) politically motivated killings. Particularly troubling, Khaleef argued, is the systematic killing of academics. He said that, while some academics have been killed by armed gangs who wanted money, others were targeted because they were considered to be Ba'athists.

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Comment  
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¶8. (C) Khaleef's comments are similar to those of many Shia with whom we speak. He is supportive of CF actions and policies, but wants us to do more. Many Shia are impatient with the pace of Iraq's reconstruction, and look to the U.S. to speed things up. Shia intellectuals such as Khaleef have little faith in the GOI to fix Iraq's problems.

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